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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the student attrition rate, particularly that of freshmen, in economic terms--loss of students means loss of revenue (tuition) and maintains that, with proper planning colleges could retain an additional 10 percent of freshmen students who drop out. The authors contend that many college freshmen are confused by an over-abundance of counseling programs and that, not only are these duplicated programs expensive to operate they often provide the student with conflicting information. Specific suggestions are offered for student retention. The authors conclude that communication, cooperation, consolidation and coordination are the keys to a successful and less confusing counseling program. (HMV)

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THE SURVIVAL GAME -- ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AND STUDENT PERSONNEL

by

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Attached is t..e text of the presentation made at the A.C.P.A. national convention, March 7, 1975. This presentation was preceded by a narrated slide series titled "A Humorous History of Higher Education."

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ATTRITION - NATIONAL AND LOCAL

A Dollars and Cents Perspective

Trying to talk about student attrition with accuracy is as difficult and conflicting as the six blind men describing the elephant. Most of the attrition studies follow an entering freshman class for four years to come up with figures. But in the meantime, some studies correct for incoming transfers, outgoing transfers, stop-out students, part-time students and five year bachelorate programs. The samples vary, the methodology varies and all of the conclusions and percentages vary.

Because of these conflicting views of the beast, I went to the U.S. Office of Education for a broader overview. The USOE figures were derived from national reports as to the number of entering freshman students and the number of bachelorate degrees conferred four years later. These statistics, from 1957 to 1973, show only a variation of 4.8% attrition in 1972 and 1973. While this indicates that retention has imporved nationally over this twelve year period--still that entering class of freshmen in 1969 was over 1,700,000 students strong and in 1973 slightly over 900,000 had graduated while 800,000 had not. (It might be interesting to check your own institution's retention-attrition figures over this 12 year period for comparison).

I believe that we could accept the assumptions that all students who enter college ought not be there and that others would be better off at another institution, but we are losing a great number of students over the long haul and with the current dollar crunch, it would behoove us to analyze the <u>when</u> and <u>why</u> of our attrition individually and then seek to change the pattern.

Again, using national averages, rather than a specific institution, lets take a <u>dollars and cents view of the problem</u>.

Over that 12-year period of 1961 to 1973, the average attrition rate

was 48.8%. Let us assume an entering freshman class of 2,000 students at a tuition rate of $2,500 per student per year. The first year tuition fees would be $5,000,000, or $20 million over the four year period. With the 48.8% attrition, we would, during the four year period, lose 976 students. Let us assume we lost 1/2 of these 976 students at the conclusion of their freshman year--that would be 488 student tuitions lost for the next three years, or $3,660,000. If the remaining 488 students were lost at the end of the Sophomore year, it would be the loss of 488 student tuitions for two years or $2,440,000. This would be a loss of $6,100,000 in tuition during this four year period.

Now things don't work out this easily, but it does show the $ and ¢ necessity to reduce attrition. Just remember--for every student you lose--you have to recruit four more to break even. State universities are having similar problems because their state subsidy brings them very close to this $2,500 tuition level.

Most surely we are not going to have 100% retention, but if student affairs and academic affairs could develop university-wide programs to deal with these real problems, as they exist, the figure could well be reduced.

The attrition problems will vary from institution to institution, but when research data (not armchair guesses) identify weaknesses, voids or ineffective programming, then institutional approaches can be developed to cope with the problem. Everyone dealing with the problem can sometimes be as bad as no one dealing with the problem. Cooperative action is the key--or we will lose the survival game.

Now lets take a look at some real statistics from a real institution with some real problems--still unsolved.

The University of Miami has an overall attrition rate of about 40%--close to the national average--but who really wants to be average.

In the fall of 1972, the University of Miami had an incoming freshman class of 2,279 students. This generated over $2,848,000 for that single semester.

During that semester or at its conclusion, we had lost 319 students, or a reduction of income for the second semester of almost $400,000.

Now the zinger. The following fall when the class returned as sophomores--990 of them didn't! Of the 2279, 990 of the students failed to return as sophomores. Those 990 students represent almost $2 1/2 million of tuition income for that year.

Again, some of those students probably shouldn't have been there in the first place, and others transferred because of majors, etc. However, of the 990 student who left, there was a substantial number of students who just missed making their grades. There were 130 students who earned between a 1.5 and 1.99 G.P.A. Maybe just one letter grade higher in one subject area would have made the difference between "making their grades and not." Perhaps academic programming could have made the difference. There was another significant group of students--207 to be exact--who earned between a 2.0 and 2.49 G.P.A. who left the institution. Perhaps social and academic programming could have made the difference for this group of students. Nevertheless--these 337 students that left--who probably could have stayed--represent almost $850,000 a year in tuition and 34% of the 990 students lost. To retain these 337 students would be ideal--but perhaps not realistic.

If, however, the institution could retain an additional 10% of these students--which I don't feel is unrealistic--this would mean only an increase of 99 students--but annually $247,500 in additional tuition income.

Now it isn't easy--and I didn't say that it was, but I do feel that this 10% figure is realistic if we would analyze, plan and implement cooperatively.

The Survival Game: Academic and Student Personnel

Tom has used the University of Miami to show how the phenomena of attrition has affected our capital resources. To us, the loss of 990 students means a loss of 2.5 million dollars in one year. The loss of attrition revenues, while serious in the past, has become more serious in view of the admission struggle to recruit over 2,200 new freshmen each year from a dwindling pool of applicants. Put very simply, we need the "drop out" dollars for continued survival.

Obviously, declining student enrollment and a questionable economic future is being felt by all segments of the academic community from vice presidents to faculty; to student personnel workers and other service workers. Yet it is quite possible that this crisis, if I may call it one, will motivate all segments of the University to:

1. Assess what higher education is all about.
2. Redefine goals for continued existence in a changing society.
3. More clearly define strategies for accomplishing stated goals.
4. Generate non-competitive and functional roles and responsibilities for personnel assigned to implement University goals and objectives.

The strategy outlined above is dependent on communication, consolidation, cooperation, and coordination between and among personnel in academic affairs, student affairs, and financial affairs. It is my feeling that while all divisions of the University may realize cognatively why the four c's mentioned above are important;

(a) tradition, (b) vested interest, (c) lack of inertia and (d) fear, prevail to impede progress.

Let me see if I can illustrate what I mean by focusing on one problem area, Attrition. For the moment let's accept the assumption that it is possible to reduce attrition at a university, which by the way is a prevailing attitude at our school. How might the problem be viewed by

the following University representatives:

(a) academic affairs

(b) student affairs and

(c) financial affairs.

Academic Affairs:

Let's first examine the Division of Academic Affairs. In response to crisis, the wise academician seeing fewer students in this program recognizes a serious challenge to his domain. You realize of course that the first awareness of the reality mentioned above comes when a tenured faculty member is released because his department has zero students (far-fetched not at all). At the University of Miami two years ago we lost two full-tenured professors because the Division of Vocational Education was no longer continued. These individuals were left without a home at the University of Miami. Currently the Department of Foreign Language is locked in a battle in the College of Arts and Sciences to determine whether or not the Language Department will survive. As the University moves toward adjusting or doing away with the language requirement many of the professors tenured in those departments are surely threatened).

Academicians are beginning to recognize the importance of (1) developing new programs and specialties which are appealing to a changing consumer market and (2) working with present student populations to encourage retention within the University and within their respective departments. The latter statement does not mean that departments are lowering their standards in order to retain students, it simply means the departments and professors are beginning to pay more attention to students in the hopes they will be able to retain them.

The movement by academicians into an examination of retention strategies include:

1. improving academic advising
2. offering Peer Advising within departmental units
3. developing tutorial and skill development sessions within departments

4. generating student-faculty rap sessions
5. supporting departmental and/or school governments and associations.

The reality expressed in these developments suggest a movement by academicians to regain responsibilities freely abdicated to student personnel workers in "better times." In institutions where a "territorial imperative" is operating, the stage is set for a duplication of effort and conflict between divisions. Certainly a situation to be avoided in the mid-70's when financial resources are increasingly scarce.

Student Affairs:

An examination of Divisions of Student Affairs also reveals problems. Declining enrollment puts pressure on student affairs personnel. In private schools, admissions officers are hard-pressed to attract the necessary quota of applicants from shrinking pools of college-bound students. At Miami, for instance, I am told that the differential between applicants and those applicants who are offered positions at the University of Miami are shrinking to a very low percentage. This means that our University is approximating an open-admission policy just to secure the approximately 2,000 students necessary to maintain status quo.

Other personnel workers are being challenged to provide a non-academic institutional environment which would be conducive to student growth and development. Stated in non-professional terms, what I am saying, or perhaps the question that I am asking is "What can we do to hold students in? This demand to "hold-in" students has generated a response on the part of student personnel workers. The response includes an increased emphasis on new strategies in such old areas as:

1. orientation
2. residence hall advising
3. reading and study skills development
4. career development
5. etc.

Again many of these programs are in competition with similar programs being operated or initiated by academic divisions. We must ask how this duplication

of effort accomplished the tasks and goals of the University.

Financial Affairs:

We cannot leave the University without taking a look at the Division of Financial Affairs. A typical financial affairs response to economic crisis is to declare that a crisis exists. The Business Manager's charge or the Vice President of Financial Affairs charge from Boards of Trustees and Regents seems to be one of proclaiming or projecting deficits or surplus in the University budget. Obviously the projection of a surplus presents no problem. Deficits, on the other hand, usually require a rapid response from both academic and student personnel leaders. When deficits are diagnosed by business managers, a reaction is felt both in the Division of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. Since these programs constitute a substantial portion of the obligations of the university, budget pressure is usually exerted against these divisions to move the account ledgers back into the "black." This type of pressure obviously produces stress within the academic environment. The question seems to be, how does that stress manifest itself?

One reaction to the stress has been the proliferation of programs designed to hold-in students. Between our two divisions, Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, students and especially freshmen students are being loved, programed, helped, and participated to death. Does this kind of attention accomplish what we are after? I am not sure!

A good example of what I have described in abstract terms for the past few minutes, in my opinion, seems to be happening at our institution. Let me illustrate what I mean by focusing on two specific areas related to attrition: (1) academic advising, and (2) study skills development. In September of this academic year, the Division of Academic Affairs, initiated the freshman academic student service center which was designed to provide entering freshmen with a "home" during their entry year. Specifically, the center was designed to provide the following types of services:

1. Academic advisement for program planning (except for those students who were housed in the School of Nursing, the School of Music, the School of Education, and the School of Engineering and Environmental Design).
2. A central office for administration. (I am sure that many of our students might regard this as an office for administeria. Nevertheless, on a large campus it is important that students have a central facility where they might come for advise with respect to such matters as changing schools or majors, dropping courses, adding courses, and dealing with the general rules and regulations applicable to survival in a major university).
3. An orientation program for all freshmen entering the University. While the focus on this orientation program was primarily in the academic domain, it is extremely difficult to approach the academic domain without talking about the total university environment and the services which do exist for students within that environment. (Thus, we find some duplication of effort between the program operated by the freshmen center and the activities of student personnel workers in other segments of the University).
4. A study skills and testing program designed to diagnose study problems, study weaknesses.
5. A peer counseling, --- groups advising program, designed to assist students who have been over-diagnosed earlier as having study skills problems.
6. Intervention groups consisting of trained peer counselors,--- I mean peer advisors, ready and eager to help floundering freshmen.

All of these functions were initiated September 1, 1974. Students were tested, advised, scheduled, and .... in my opinion confused! Why?

Because these same freshmen were exposed to several other University groups and programs providing this same general type of assistance. I would submit many of these students suffered and were confused by University "over kill" or "over-help." and perhaps we're talking about the same thing.

Again, let me illustrate. At Miami, within the Academic Division, honorary societies or fraternaties in physics, chemistry, biology and pre-med contact and offer assistance to entering freshmen who have declared majors in the areas mentioned earlier. Obviously, these honor students want to get the new freshmen on the right track. In addition, several schools (e.g., Education, Nursing, Music, and Engineering) contact entering freshmen, welcome them to the University, and in many instances set up appointments whereby these entering freshmen may talk with academic advisors about their freshmen year programs. All of this activity is in addition to the work of the freshmen academic advising center. This means that a student may have received four separate mailings from the University all encouraging him to move in a different direction for academic advice.

Student Affairs personnel, also conscious of the needs of freshmen, have initiated a series of programs designed to a new student make the transition from high school to college. Again using our institution as a model, we have an SOS program (Student Orientation Service) launched to help acclimate freshmen to the campus. At the same time, Residence Hall advisors were directing their attention to entering students to insure their adjustment (e.g., orientation, registration, scheduling, and advising).

Not to be left out, student government also designed a special intervention project to assist entering freshmen. What were the student government objectives? I don't know, but I am sure they are similar to the freshmen academic advising center, the goals established by the honorary fraternaties, basic advising objectives of the various schools, activities of the SOS groups, and intervention strategies developed by residence hall advisors. Confused? I am! What about freshmen?

I am sure the goals of all these organizations and the intent of all the individuals involved are well meaning. After all Tom and I both have been involved in many of the programs mentioned above. We have had some responsibility in the freshmen academic center and with other academic affairs programs.

With all of these activities to help the new student, what happens when he comes into contact with:

1. SOS Sally who tells her she needs a foreign language in the School of Education. The problem of course might be that the foreign language is not required in the School of Education for majors. If Sally finds this out at the mid point in her second semester, she is going to wonder about the quality of advice which was given.

2. Or Peer-Advisor Harry who says to a student, "Don't worry about the course sequences in Speech and Hearing Sciences." This by the way is a major in the School of Education. Harry says everything will work out. The problem of course, is that in the School of Education, Speech and Hearing Science majors must follow a very rigid sequence because some courses are offered only once a year. If the student deviates from the scope and sequence it is quite possible that he will add another academic semester.

3. Or Faculty Advisor-Dr. Absent who fails to meet with his advisee because he feels that his coffee break is more important than keeping an appointment. Of course, the most unconscionable sin committed by faculty advisors occurs when the faculty member is not familiar with the basic university requirements and because of his lack of interest or motivation to be concerned about advising, provides a student with misinformation or inaccurate information. How do you explain that to a student?

4. Or finally, Residence Hall Hanna - who recommends to a directed study student, (our term for a probationary-admit student) that they can take 18 hours of course work.

It's interesting to observe, that Residence Hall Hanna did not have access to test data on Jane and thereby was unable to recognize the fact that for directed study students, a 12 hour load is all that is permitted. Hanna's

encouragement for Jane to take advanced biology, advanced placement English, and other courses seems at best, ill-advised.

See the problem! Ever wonder why students say "hell with it, I'll take care of myself." Perhaps they are right, after all we have selected the best and the finest! Haven't we? Do they really need all our help?

When I started this section, I said that I had two areas: advising and study skills development. Well, the study skills trip is the same as the one outlined for academic advising. In the academic area we have:

1. departmental tutorial programs when based by faculty members and by honors students.
2. a residential academic program (RAP).
3. student initiated programs (SIP).
4. individual faculty members who are interested in providing assistance.
5. private tutors who are working for a salary.
6. the Freshman Academic Advising Center - pre-advisors.

In the student personnel area we have:

1. the Guidance Center - staffed by professionals and available for helping students with psychological problems.
2. the Reading Center
3. residence halls advisory staff members. (Including a trained psychologist).
4. two counselors - (trained by the Guidance Center).
5. Open Door - (a student-operated intervention program).

With all these opportunities for help, you would think every student on our campus would be fully adjusted and not need assistance. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Last year 300 plus students dropped out at the end of the first semester and by the end of the first academic year a total of 990 students failed to return. We sure expect to lose some, but 990? I feel that most of our approaches were well intentioned, yet perhaps, what we really have is a paper approach to programming designed to look good in the annual

1. Can we intervene?

2. Should we intervene?

3. If so, how?

4. Given that we should intervene, whose responsibility will it be to provide the program strategies?

5. How will we assess whether or not we have been successful?

Cooperate! I think that means "tell it like it is," which of course, means tell it like you see it. Oftentimes the way you see it is not the way it is. (Remember, I see the tail of the elephant and maybe you see the trunk).

We can afford failures only if we can profit and learn from them. A form needs to be established in which cooperative guidelines can be developed for action programs which address critical issues. Here are some ways in which we need to approach the problem.

1. Accept the fact that resources are scarce.

2. Let the Admissions Office help us analyze the student population and compare that information with data generated from Institutional Research.

3. Contract with Guidance Center (they do have a consultation responsibility) to help train faculty and students to intervene in the most appropriate way. After all, people in the guidance centers do have certain professional expertise.

4. Get the activities people involved and let them provide meaningful learning experiences which bridge across both student life and academic life. It would be extremely helpful if in the selection of speakers for campus we try to link these presentations with some of the academic activities which are taking place.

5. Academicians cooperate, participate in a forum, gathered together to try and debate and discuss and then act on the critical issues. I am sure if I keep going I could think of even more things in which there is a basis for mutual cooperation but let me move on to the next item -- consolidation.

<u>Consolidate</u>!

Redundant programs are expensive. Do we have a real need for all the activities I mentioned earlier with respect to our advising problems and our study skills problems. If so, why! If not, let's abandon what we are

reports from the respective divisions.

It seems to me we still need to examine our four "C's."

1. Communication
2. Cooperation
3. Consolidation
4. Coordination

What's new about that? Nothing, except many of us ignore one or more of these principles in our day-to-day existence as we defend our castles. The greater the press in some institutions the higher the walls and the stronger the defenses. You might say, "Okay, so I buy your communicate, cooperate, consolidate, and coordinate model." What's in it for me?" Well, I'm not quite sure how to answer that question except, I feel it might help all of us protect our jobs in a professionally and mutually beneficial way. We need to pay more attention to the four "C"'s mentioned above.

It's easy to talk in glowing abstracts! Hopefully, I can give you some concrete examples of what I'm talking about when I refer to the four "C's". Bear with me and see if I can do it.

Communicate, remember! Well, our initial problem was attrition. What does attrition mean when we (members of academic affairs and student affairs) examine the data-base provided by Institutional Research? That pronoun we refers to academic types and personnel types sitting in the same room addressing the question without a responsibility for defending themselves for battles lost or commending themselves for battles won. Maybe in addressing the problem of attrition we'll find the real problem is communication. Of course the goal in this instance, is to identify our problem. For example, over half of the Miami drop-outs had grade point averages below 1.9. It would seem that a realistic question for those in charge of both personnel programs and academic programs at the University would be to ask some of the following questions:

doing and build a model which helps the greatest number of students possible using the resources which are available. Here I am referring to those human and voluntary resources which if pooled, it seems to me, would be a much greater university resource.

Coordinate:

After consolidating our activities, let's coordinate what we are doing. Let's schedule for maximum efficiency. As one person suggested recently, if your Student Union is over-subscribed for the movie "Shampoo" don't get upset if a residence hall shows the same flick the same night. On the other hand, if you have a "bummer," one performance should be enough. This just seems to make sense. Again in the coordination process, if the Academic Affairs people want responsibility for academic advising let's consolidate the troops and help them make it the best possible advising system. If on the other hand, Student Affairs wants responsibility for tackling the study skills problems, help them with personnel from the Academic Division which might be useful in solving the problem.

The implications for student personnel training programs seem to me to be clear. Let's make student personnel workers the best possible Communicators, Cooperators, Consolidators, and Coordinators by giving them the skills, experiences, and self-confidence to interact with the other professional staff within the University. It would seem to me that in an institutional setting no one animal is more important than any other animal.